Articles

Classroom Management and the Librarian

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Abstract

As librarians take on more instructional responsibilities, the need for classroom management skills becomes vital. Unfortunately, classroom management skills are not taught in library school and therefore, many librarians are forced to learn how to manage a classroom on the job. Different classroom settings such as one-shot instruction sessions and for-credit courses require different management techniques. Also, individuals are often more comfortable with certain strategies compared to other strategies for managing a classroom. With different course settings and personalities of instructors the need to learn classroom management strategies must be recognized for its importance in successful classes taught by librarians.

Introduction

Academic librarians have conducted classroom instruction for well over a century, but only in the last 30 years has the focus of "librarian-as-teacher" evolved, thanks in part to the changes in academic curriculum, student body demographics, and expansion of information technology in higher education (Walter, 2008). The push on many campuses to integrate information literacy skills throughout the curriculum, the growing exigency to assess information literacy skills for accreditation, and the inclusion of these skills in learning outcomes assessment place academic librarians squarely in the middle of these campus discussions. More than ever, librarians collaborate with discipline faculty and take an important role in instruction (Meulemans & Brown, 2001). Academic librarians have "strived to expand bibliographic instruction (BI) into a larger concept - *information literacy* - as a method for ensuring their inclusion within the traditional professoriate" (Davis, 2007, p. 81). Many academic positions in the field now require librarians to teach "one-shot" classes where a librarian is asked to teach one session of a professor's class. In these one-shot class sessions, librarians introduce students to library resources and/or help with a specific research project the professor has assigned. In some cases, librarians also teach semester-long information literacy courses, often without formal training (Davis, 2007).

Regardless of the length of the instruction, the emphasis for librarians has always been on the student, through assessment, learning styles and student learning outcomes, but the librarian-as-teacher component also needs attention. What classroom skills does the instructor already have? What skills are required to manage a dynamic classroom? What happens if the focus suddenly shifts from the lecture to a student or situation? Classroom management includes multiple aspects, including interaction with faculty and students, participant questions, challenges and reactions, unforeseen outcomes and potentially sticky predicaments, all meandering under the surface while the librarian focuses on the lesson at hand. It is about being prepared and knowing even over preparing cannot help in every situation. Classroom management is specifically defined as "all of the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time, and materials so that student learning can take place" (Wong & Wong, 2005, p. 84). Instructors may be given a pre-approved curriculum or one-shot lesson plan, but ultimately decisions regarding the governing of the classroom fall to the librarian. Obtaining the skills to manage a classroom is necessary for librarians to have success.

Literature Review

Classroom management is one of the most influential factors for determining not only the success of the teacher, but also academic success for students (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). Clement (2010) goes so far as to claim "…one can hardly be considered a highly-qualified teacher without a mastery of sound best-practice strategies for managing classroom time, space and student behavior" (p. 41). The training has long been left to the education field, but adequately preparing teachers in a systematic way has been a challenge for even this discipline (Emmer & Stough, 2001). Oliver and Reschly (2007) suggest teacher preparation programs move beyond a theoretical approach and should provide ample opportunities for guided practice and feedback in organizational procedures and instructional strategies, as well as implementing both preventative management strategies. Clement (2010) suggests "there is no one correct way to establish classroom management and discipline. All new teachers must find their own comfortable balance between friendliness and assertiveness" (p. 43). This concern for learning classroom management skills is one that is still of utmost concern for the education field, particularly the balance of theory and field practice. In a study of 71 pre-service teachers' orientations to classroom management, Putman (2009) found student teachers might experience their first instance of full control of the classroom during pre-service teaching, which may or may not be under the guidance of the supervising teacher. As participants practiced classroom management and found success, they reported their views regarding their own abilities to implement techniques associated with the classroom teacher improved. Putman (2009) also found supervising teachers were a greater influence on classroom management techniques than coursework. Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, and Fry (2004) also indicate there can be a great divide between what university professors communicate to pre-service teachers and what they see practiced in the field.

When there is growing evidence the education field finds it difficult to prepare pre-service teachers when classroom management is practiced as a field exercise in standard curriculum (Ritter & Hancock, 2007; Stoughton, 2005), how are librarians going to be prepared when classroom teaching is not the primary focus of the profession? As Avery and Ketchner (1996) reported, most academic reference positions require teaching skills and this still stands true. Library and Information Science (LIS) programs offering user-education courses was well reviewed by Westbrook, who noted a rise in the areas of bibliographic instruction, information literacy, and user education, terms used interchangeably for courses on instruction from the 1970s to the late 1990s (Westbrook, 1999). The first LIS courses specializing in user instruction were recorded in 1976, with four of the 57 accredited programs offering full time recurrent credit courses (Westbrook, 1999). By 1999, more than 50% of accredited programs offered full time credit courses on library-user education (Mbabu, 2009). These courses have traditionally offered training on learning theory, instructional design, teaching techniques, and program management.

However, Julien (2005) found that worldwide, 51.6% of library schools still offered no course in information literacy instruction. The literature regarding library instruction also emphasizes the need for additional instructional skills to be taught in LIS programs. The Association of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) (2008) Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators: A Practical Guide states that instruction librarians should have skills in communication, instructional design, planning, presentation, and teaching. The Immersion Program offered through ACRL provides professionals a way to fill the gap in LIS classroom training, including teaching participants classroom techniques, learning theory, leadership, and assessment framed in the context of information literacy (ACRL, 2013). In this intensive 4.5 day training program, participants learn to

"design meaningful instructional activities that address different learning styles, recognizing different student motivations, backgrounds, and experiences, in order to address student learning needs in a coherent and systematic fashion" (ACRL, 2013, Learning Outcomes, para. 2) as well as "adopt a constructivist approach to information literacy instruction in order to develop a theoretical perspective and foundation for selecting teaching approaches and learning activities" (ACRL, 2013, Learning Outcomes, para. 3).

Traditional LIS courses may not spend adequate time dedicated to each aspect to prepare professionals who may be unable to participate in the Immersion Program (Meulemans & Brown, 2001). According to Houtman (2010), "there is a real cost to the lack of adequate support for learning to teach in the profession" (p. 37). Houtman (2010) notes librarians "use different techniques and strategies; position themselves within different learning paradigms; address different kinds of audiences on different subjects; employ different and always-changing technologies" (p. 19). Partello (2005) also emphasizes the importance of librarians learning to teach so that instruction sessions are taught in a way that is effective for learning. Teaching has become ingrained in the profession, with librarians in many different areas reaching a variety of patrons. A brief review of education articles by Davis (2007) shows academic librarians are rarely mentioned in education, where many articles regarding library collaboration at different scholastic levels (elementary, secondary or higher education) are initiated within librarianship, not teaching. The field of education covers classroom management extensively. The literature is thorough in the examination of the concept and how instructors can best use management roles in the classroom to help students learn. When classes are well managed students have an increased opportunity to learn (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003) and the number one influence on student learning, other than personal abilities, is classroom management (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). Much of literature focused on K-12 classroom management strategies, but concepts can be used and adapted for the higher education classroom. After an extensive search, the authors found no recent professional librarianship literature on classroom management techniques specifically for academic librarians.

Library-user instruction plays an important role in introducing library research and Mbabu (2009) argues LIS courses in information literacy need to position library-user instruction clearly within the larger context of student learning. Mbabu's (2007) content analysis of textbooks used for information literacy programs in LIS programs showed most of the texts focused on such topics as instructional models, techniques, design and methods; learning theory and curriculum; motivation; testing; measurement; grant writing; and student assessment. A recent review of online course descriptions by Mbabu (2009) showed that 49 out of 57 (86%) ALA-accredited LIS programs offered at least one continuing credit course dedicated to user-education, information literacy, bibliographic instruction, or instructional roles.

Westbrock and Fabian's (2010) survey found librarians largely learn on the job, with some self-teaching also involved, although the respondents said they would have preferred learning many of the skills at library school. They suggest a disconnect between professional education and professional responsibilities (Westbrock & Fabian, 2010). Houtman (2010) takes this discussion one step further and suggests a disconnect between librarian's expectations of library school instruction courses and how much coursework alone can prepare students for teaching. She proposes librarians require a broad infrastructure to support learning, one that may include formal training at library school, mentoring, support from colleagues, institutional support, continuing education, and self-study.

Walter (2008) reports the professional literature regarding librarians-as-educators falls into three categories: the degree to which academic coursework focuses on instruction available to pre-service librarians as part of their professional education, other avenues librarians have pursued to become proficient in instructional responsibilities, and the core competencies that should be mastered by a librarian to become an effective instructor. His survey of instruction librarians found most participants shared the feeling that they were not prepared for "the amount of time they would be required to dedicate to instruction in professional positions by the way in which teaching and learning (as a field of study) was treated in their professional education programs" (Walter 2008, p. 64).

Tindell and Bohlander (2012) address new and emerging concerns with classroom management. They focus on the proliferation of technology use by students while in class and found 92% of students have used a cellphone to text during class. With technology distractions so prevalent in today's college classrooms, managing the class is crucial. Bjorklund and Rehling (2010) conducted a survey to determine what behaviors occurred in college classrooms that students found disruptive. Twenty-three disruptive behaviors were identified and ranged from sleeping to doing homework for other classes. Through this study, a need for classroom management is demonstrated from the perspective of the student. It also provides instructor librarians with a focus when considering how best to manage a classroom, based on students' beliefs of what most disrupts the class and inhibits learning.

Classroom management theories and the practice of managing a classroom have varied over time. The approaches to classroom management range from discipline and managing behaviors (Canter & Canter, 2001) to focus on instructor training (Gordon & Burch, 1971). The many views on managing a classroom can make the learning process overwhelming. Therefore, finding the method that works best for the person teaching is important, although what is required in managing a classroom can vary from class section to section. Having a reservoir of classroom management techniques to use can help ensure the class flows smoothly (Marzano, et al., 2003). Davies, Moen, and Dykstra (2009) note a person's view of appropriate classroom management varies based on his or her personal beliefs. This further supports the prerequisite for classroom management strategies to be taught in library school, so when the librarian is teaching he or she is comfortable knowing he or she can negotiate the situation. Yet, if librarians are not learning skills such as classroom management techniques while in library school, how will they be prepared to cope with the demands of teaching?

The Need for Classroom Management Skills

John Dewey (2008) stated, "We never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment" (Chapter 2, para. 17). The environment is determined by how instructors manage their classrooms. The key elements of classroom management identified by McLeod, Fisher, and Hoover (2003) are the use of time and space, instructional strategies, and building effective relationships between students and teachers, many university instructors face classroom management concerns (Oruc, 2011). With class disruptions, librarians must possess classroom management skills, as many issues can arise during an instruction session that need to be handled with professionalism (Meulemans & Brown, 2001).

However, classroom management skills are not always at the top of the list when creating instruction. A single class session may be the only time given to a librarian and the focus is

usually on guaranteeing a checklist of certain topics are covered in a productive and engaging way (Meulemans & Brown, 2001). Without proper management though, a lesson can quickly and easily unravel. Developing skills in classroom management can save instruction time and provide better learning opportunities for students. The systematic development of a lesson plan, activities and assessment require librarians to develop not only knowledge of the theoretical aspects of instruction, but also actively apply these theories in the classroom. In a national survey of new instruction librarians, Click and Walker (2010) found 24% of the respondents found developing and maintaining student interest and involvement to be the most difficult. For some, a lack of preparation in library school leads to a lack of confidence in maintaining a classroom full of students. For others, the insecurity stems from a lack of communication with students and/or the faculty member, if the librarian is an invited guest.

Padmaja (2012) notes, "Effective communication skill is the heart of good classroom management" (p. 41). Successful communication with students sets the stage for the class, providing students with the knowledge of the expected behavior, what the instructor plans to accomplish, and creating safe an atmosphere for asking questions and learning. This is the foundation and an easy way to start communicating with students is verbally reviewing why the librarian was invited to the classroom and writing the outline for the class on the board or posting it on the projection screen. An all-too-familiar scene is one where the students have not read the syllabus (or quickly-posted announcement, if a sudden faculty absence occurs) and are unsure why the librarian is in the classroom, particularly if the normal faculty member is not present to make introductions. The librarian should calm these apprehensions, reassure students of what is going to be covered, and how it benefits the students. A friendly introduction and firm acknowledgement the class is beginning will help get students settled and focused on the tasks. Starting out the class with expectations for proper behavior and focus will help mitigate potential issues and sets the stage for a successfully managed classroom.

Once classes start, the types of activities used are another part classroom management. Meyers, Bender, Hill, and Thomas (2006) found conflict in college classrooms was associated with the instruction provided by the instructor; those who were caring and expressed it during class had fewer instances of antagonistic activity in the classroom. Instructors who engaged with students through active learning and through class discourse had students who were more likely to pay attention and were less disruptive than professors who lectured for the entire class period. Learning to manage a classroom through teaching methods, course activities, and building relationships by showing compassion and care are foundations for classroom success.

For-credit courses and one-shots

Formal library instruction generally falls into two distinct formats: for-credit courses and one-time visits. As information literacy courses are introduced in campus-wide curricula, librarians have an increased opportunity to teach credit-bearing courses (Owusu-Ansah, 2004). These courses can be one, two, or three credit hours. They can be in an online, face-to-face, or hybrid format and can be accelerated or last an entire term. For-credit courses allow the instructor time to set the stage for an efficiently run classroom. The expectations for classroom behavior and engagement need to be made clear at the beginning of a course (verbally and in the syllabus), and then maintained throughout the class. Changing expectations once a course has started is more difficult than starting out with firm a classroom management plan (Marzano, et al., 2003). Best-practices for information literacy courses include problem-based instruction and active learning (Burkhardt, MacDonald, &

Rathemacher, 2010). These tactics will keep the students engaged and demonstrate a need for the material, thereby reducing the number of classroom management issues.

One-time visits (also known as "one-shots") by the librarian present unique classroom management requirements. The librarian may have as little as 15 minutes or as much as 90 minutes to present material, engage students, and assess learning, often without ever stepping foot in the classroom before or after the singular lecture. He or she may have a defined checklist of items to be covered from the library or the faculty member or may be invited to give "the library speech" as an open-ended lecture with no further defined goals than "introducing students to the library." In a national study on career choice and perceptions of academic librarians, Davis (2007) found that 58% of the respondents had never taught a full semester or quarter course in any topic or subject, but 45% had taught "one-shot" courses at least 15 or more times per semester or quarter. Virtually all respondents identified the "one-shot" bibliographic instruction session as an instruction format offered at their respective institutions (Davis, 2007, p. 86). Sixty-three percent of the respondents identified nervousness as their primary feeling right before teaching a class, despite formal or informal training and 13% worried about disengaged students (Davis, 2007). The time constraints and specific objectives stress the need for the students to be engaged during the lesson (Meulemans & Brown, 2001).

Explaining to students at the beginning of the session what they can expect to occur throughout the class period is beneficial (Vander Meer, Ring, & Perez-Stable, 2007). This communication aids in mentally preparing the students for the session and also, helps to create a natural flow for the learning. Whether in a for-credit course or a one-shot session, librarians can connect at the beginning of a class with students, the start of relationship building (Padmaja, 2012). When visiting courses for one-shot instruction sessions, the classroom atmosphere often depends on the tone set by the course instructor. To help combat this issue, the course instructor should discuss with the students the importance of the topic and why he or she asked the librarian to visit the class. The librarian should enlist the help of the classroom instructor to emphasize the importance of the upcoming (or current) session and ask students to give the visiting librarian the same respect and attention they would give the instructor (Padmaja, 2012). This helps set the approach for the session (Vander Meer, et al., 2007). The expectations for classroom behavior and engagement need to be made clear at the beginning of a class or course, and then maintained.

If the instructor is not present for the class, then a librarian providing an instruction session can be viewed as a substitute, and students may offer less attention and respect than a regular instructor, with a student or two even exiting the classroom. This is not always feasible, if the faculty member is ill or otherwise suddenly indisposed and the librarian is asked to speak so the class is not canceled. In this instance, the librarian should be prepared for some initial pushback, such as concerns over the missing instructor, questions about assignment dates and other anxieties are immediately voiced. Again, answering questions and addressing concerns can keep the classroom on-track and help in managing students so the lesson can be delivered as smoothly as possible.

General techniques

Many aspects of classroom management can be applied to nearly any instruction session. First, physical classroom management issues may range from technical difficulties with classroom settings (faulty computers, denied databases access and inadequate Internet access) to disruptive, apathetic or absent faculty and/or disengaged students. Techniques for meeting these challenges can include quick thinking and responses, creative rearrangement

of lesson plan topics, patience for allowing students to make mistakes during activities and to share opinions and permitting faculty clarify assignment guidelines throughout the lesson. A sense of humor in the midst of possible classroom chaos (tornado warnings going off, emergency lights being tested, and sprinklers going off) is imperative in keeping students and instructors at ease and maintaining control of the classroom (Vander Meer, et al., 2007). Larger classes and lecture halls bring special problems, such as widespread chitchat, late arrivals, early departures, texting, or checking email on laptops. These problems possibly relate to general student attitudes regarding large lecture classes, including a lack of respect for the instructor, the perception that large lecture courses are less valuable and that a different code of behavior is acceptable (Carbone, 1998). The physical constraints and possibilities for larger spaces should be considered when planning activities, as modifications will be necessary and classroom activities should be scaled differently from in a smaller lab or classroom.

Second, an effective classroom manager ties class activities to learning objectives (Wong & Wong, 2005), benefitting both the instructor and the students. By aligning in-class activities with objectives, the instructor can confirm the planned activities (and any potential modifications) meet not only the needs of the students, but also the learning outcomes. Students see the bigger picture through this alignment, and understand the activities (lecture, group work) are not without purpose. Instructors should manage and lead in their classrooms (Minter, 2011). Whetten and Cameron (1991) note that managers need leadership skills and leadership skills are also needed by managers. When classroom management is seen as leading a room full of students, the concepts and methods can be easier to understand and apply.

When teaching in an unfamiliar classroom for the first time, the librarian should arrive early to set up equipment. Sometimes, this is unfeasible if multiple classes are scheduled in a row, but even a few extra minutes can make the difference. This also allows time to greet students in a friendly manner as they enter the classroom. Ice breakers such as comments on the weather, the current standing of the school's team (football, basketball) or other neutral topics can help students share and connect before the lesson begins. Ababneh (2012) describes communication as essential for "relationship-building" (p. 301). This can be done through the telling of a short story, a joke, or a personal anecdote. When the student feels a connection with the instructor, they will be comfortable asking questions and learning from the instructor throughout the duration of the class. Relationships take time to build but time is available, in a few memorable moments in a one-shot or longer in a for-credit course time. Effectual interaction between the instructor and students is fundamental for a well-managed class. When relationships are built between the instructor and students, the students are less likely to engage in disruptive classroom behaviors (Decker, Dona, & Christianson, 2007).

At a certain point, a class is going to veer off-topic, through such missteps as the breakdown of technology access (causing students to gravitate to distractions like checking mobile phones and/or talking to their neighbors) or through conversation (a student brings up a topic or asks a question not directly related to the lecture or demonstration). Steering the class back on track is imperative and can be done through acknowledging the class is off track by saying something like, "Well that was a rabbit hole!" or "Now to get us back on track..." Maintaining a clear path can be difficult when a student asks a legitimate question, but the answer may take too long to answer. This can be particularly difficult with relevant questions with no simple answers or regarding items of a political nature. Recognize the student's question and then let him or her know it will be answered later. If possible, let the

student know at what specific part of the class he or she can expect an answer or how to find information later.

Conclusion

Effectively managing the classroom is central to the success of teaching, whether a one-shot instruction session or a semester long course. Instruction skills are not a focus of most library and information science programs and therefore, learning classroom management techniques on the job or through additional training is crucial. It must be recognized that classroom management plays a significant role for any class session to run smoothly. Learning the necessary skills and determining the best strategies takes time and a commitment to quality teaching. A perfect way to manage a classroom does not exist. It is necessary for librarians to reflect on their instruction to learn from mistakes and successes. Taking the time to learn about different classroom management strategies is useful in aiding the instructor librarian.

Learning to communicate with students and faculty is one key to a positive productive classroom. When lines of communication are open then disturbances in timing, unexpected disruptions, and unforeseen events can be handled with greater ease. Also, recognize one-shot sessions and semester long courses require different strategies, but there are also techniques that work in both settings. As librarians continue to expand instruction responsibilities and opportunities, classroom management cannot be ignored.

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